

Dr. Sad: a month and a day

David Bateman

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David Bateman's semiautobiographical novel *Dr. Sad* follows a physician through the minutiae of daily life for six months after his HIV diagnosis, creating a "song of himself, lacking in strict continuity, filled with flights of fancy, mired in memory, and littered with melancholy glee."

A doctor of philosophy with a newborn HIV diagnosis and a penchant for kitsch and William Carlos Williams, Stephen is a writer-in-residence, ex-drag queen, self-identified sometimes crossdresser, and alcoholic, but nothing so much as a queer "satyr, perhaps...all absurdist and campy, a hybrid collision." The novel's structure blends interstitial poetry, presumed to be Stephen's, into a narrative that's chronological only by association.

The story juxtaposes the ugly and sublime without distinguishing which is which, especially when it comes to the contents of a life. As one of Stephen's obsessions, kitsch influences everything. Most days, he shops at Value Village, searching for what's tacky enough to become iconic, and surrounds himself with these treasured objects, who are like people to him. As Stephen's life sketches the body's highs and lows, its indignities and delights, one bleeds into the other in an infinite loop that makes kitsch an important metric for the body as well.

Amidst Stephen's manic dance with what seems to be a medical death sentence, there's a fixation with observational bon mots on postcolonialism and Indigenous people, though this never quite aligns with the main narrative. What might have been intended as gallows humor via *fait accompli* too often comes off as a superficial concern with Canada's colonial legacy, which is invoked as background color.

Dr. Sad is a novel that portrays life as "pretense and fabrication and invented narratives we cling to in hope that one of them may one day come true."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (November / December 2020)

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